ROMANCING RELIGION
FSEM/MDST/RELI 100
2:00-5:00 PM Wednesday in HUM 226
Instructor: Claire Fanger, HUM 207
Office hours: Tues 2:30-3:30 p.m.; or by appointment
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Description: The legend of the holy grail is a motif with many modern avatars in both highbrow and popular literature, from T.S. Eliot's famous poem *The Wasteland* to the recent film by Terry Gilliam, *The Fisher King*, to the more infamous popular creations of Dan Brown and the Indiana Jones movies. In these modern stories, the grail is always mysterious, and in every retelling of the quest, it seems, the grail gets reconnected to the sacred in some new way. The object itself also changes form (for example, for Indiana Jones it is a cup, for Dan Brown, a coffin). These transformations are common in the medieval stories too. Why is it that the most famous sacred object in Christianity seems to originate not with the bible, but with what is essentially a fairy tale narrative, a romance? What are the real origins of these stories?

This course takes the grail as a focal point to look at links between romance narrative and the idea of the sacred. We start with grail legends in the middle ages, explore historical associations of the grail with medieval Christianity, and end with quest narratives and grail motifs in modern occultism, fiction and film.

Accommodations: Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact the instructor after class or during office hours. Additionally, students need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Books: The following books will be required reading; they should be in the bookstore.

Barber, Richard. *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Harvard Univ. pr. 2005) $22.
www.amazon.com/Holy-Grail-Imagination-Belief/dp/067401815X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1325967861&sr=1-1
Fortune, Dion. *Glastonbury:Avalon of the Heart* (Red Wheel, 1986)
www.amazon.com/Glastonbury-Avalon-Heart-ebook/dp/B0029U1XL4/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1326310330&sr=8-2
Goering, Joseph. *The Virgin and the Grail*. Yale, 2005. $40 new; used copies available.
www.amazon.com/Virgin-Grail-Origins-Legend/dp/0300106610/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1325967763&sr=1-1
Robert de Boron, Nigel Bryant, translator. *Merlin and the Grail: Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Perceval*. D.S. Brewer, 2005. $29.95 new; used copies available.
http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0859917797/ref=oh_o00_s00_i00_details
Lewis, C.S. *That Hideous Strength*. Scribner, 2003.
www.amazon.com/That-Hideous-Strength-Space-Trilogy/dp/0743234928/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1326142417&sr=1-1

Requirements: **Presence in class is required**. Attendance is especially important in a three hour seminar, where one class is equal to one week of class time. If you cannot be present, let me know your reason for missing the class by email beforehand. Two classes missed without excuse will lose class participation grade; three classes (i.e. three weeks of classes) missed without excuse will result in a failing grade. For description of required written assignments and presentations see the last two pages of this syllabus.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNED READINGS

Week 1 Introduction

15 Jan. We will discuss the syllabus and assignments, define romance, discuss its relation to fairy tales, and talk about how these things interact with the domain of ethics, moral judgement and the sacred. Please read Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories," available here: http://public.callutheran.edu/~brint/Arts/Tolkien.pdf. Think about whether he is describing something sacred or not.

Week 2 The beginning of the quest for the grail; *Perceval* by Chrétien de Troyes.

22 Jan. This class will consider some of the earliest texts to mention the grail. The most important of these is the Old French romance *Perceval* written in the 1180s by **Chrétien de Troyes**. We will be viewing Eric Rohmer's **film** *Perceval le Gallois* (1978) 140 min (an adaptation of this romance, with Old French dialogue mostly taken straight from Chrétien) in class. You should take notes while watching for your response next week. In preparation, please read the translation of the prologue and first three episodes of *Perceval* here: http://www.mcelhearn.com/perceval-or-the-story-of-the-grail-by-chretien-de-troyes/ (scroll down to "My Translations") and the plot synopsis of the whole work here: www.mcgoodwin.net/pages/otherbooks/ct_perceval.html
Also read the brief paragraph about the grail (circa 1202) from Helindanus here: ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/helindanus.html; and very short account of the discovery of the tomb of Arthur by Gerald of Wales (circa 1223), here: www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/1223gerald-arthurtomb.asp
Assignment #1(response to reading) due today.

Week 3 Filling out the story begun by Chrétien: Wolfram von Eschenbach.

29 Jan. Wolfram reworked the story in German likely before 1210. This story includes some adventures of Parzival's father and also Gawain, but we will concentrate on the episodes continuing the story of Perceval. In *Parzival and Titurel* (trans. Cyril Edwards, OUP, 2006), please read books 5, 9, and 16 (**OWLspace**); to fill in missing books see plot synopsis: http://www.mcgoodwin.net/pages/otherbooks/we_parzival.html; also in **Goering**, *The Virgin and the Grail*, please read the preface and chapters 1 and 2, on Chrétien and Wolfram, pp 1-39; and in **Barber**, *The Holy Grail*, please read chapter 6, on Wolfram, pp 73-86. **Assignment #2 (response to film) due today.**

Week 4 The Christian grail: Robert de Boron and Joseph of Arimathea

5 Feb**.** Writing about the same time as Wolfram von Eschenbach, but back in France, Robert de Boron elaborates some of the most familiar elements of the grail legends for the first time. Please read in **Robert de Boron,** *Merlin and the Grail***,** the story of Joseph of Arimathea, pp 15-45 and the Percival story, pp 115 to end; in **Goering,** *Virgin and the Grail*, chapters 3 and 4, pp 40-70; in **Barber**, *The Holy Grail*, read chap. 3 "Sanctifying the Grail Hero" pp 39-45. **Assignment #3 (response to reading) due today.**

Week 5 The weirder Christian grails: *Perlesvaus* and the prehistory of the grail

12 Feb. Still in France, another grail romance is written by an unknown author between 1203 and 1213 which adds some elements found nowhere else. Please read some not quite random extracts from *Perlesvaus*, translation by Nigel Bryant as *The High Book of the Grail*

(D.S. Brewer, 1978) (**OWLspace**); also read **Barber**, *The Holy Grail*, chapter 4 "The High Book of the Grail" pp 46-52; and finally on an unrelated but exciting note, read **Goering**, *The Virgin and the Grail;* chapters 5 and 6, pp 71-111. **Assignment #4 (response to reading) due today.**

Week 6 Linking the medieval and the modern: Malory and Monty Python

19 Feb. This week we'll watch the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) 91 min. Like many other takes on the legend of the grail, the Monty Python version is a pastiche, but much of the parody targets the style and concerns of Malory's late fifteenth-century compilation of Grail materials, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Read the end of Book XIII, chapters XVII-XX, (which tell of the separation of Lancelot and Perceval), Book XIV (which tracks Perceval), Book XV (which tracks Lancelot), and book XVI chapters I-V, in this edition depdent on Caxton: http://www.samizdat.qc.ca/arts/lit/malory/morte_darthur2.pdf Also please read the page "Caxton and Winchester" by prof. Sian Echard at the University of British Columbia here: http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/sechard/344win.htm Finally carry on to the end of Goering, *The Virgin and the Grail*, chapters 7 and 8, pp 112-158. **Assignment #5 TOPIC FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE TODAY**

Week 7 Modern takes on the grail legend: TS Eliot

26 Feb. TS Eliot acknowledges that his famous poem "The Wasteland" (1922) was written under the influence of Jessie Weston's famous book on the grail *From Ritual to Romance* (published just two years earlier, in 1920). Read "The Wasteland" here http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/790.html. (You can get an annotated version, if you prefer, here: eliotswasteland.tripod.com/). Read chap. xiii of Jessie Weston's book, here: www.celtic-twilight.com/camelot/weston/fr2r/fr2rch13.htm. Finally, read **Barber**, *The Holy Grail*, chapter 17, "The scholars and the grail" pp 231-255. **Assignment #6 (response to film) due today**.

Week 8

5 March. ***SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS*** (Take advantage of this time to work on your Brief Essay. NB: You may also wish to start CS Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, during break as you will need to have read the whole thing in two weeks.)

Week 9 More Modernity: Romanticism, fiction and occult religion

12 March. This class looks at 19th and early 20th century romantic depictions of grail themes. Please read Barber, *Holy Grail*, chapter 19, "The Grail as Mirror" pp 290-320; also read Tennyson's poem, Sir Galahad here: http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/tennyson-sir-galahad and Dion Fortune, *Avalon of the Heart*. As a complement to Fortune read also the article by Chas Clifton "The Novels of Dion Fortune and the Development of Gardnerian Witchcraft" (originally published in *Gnosis*, 1988), here: http://www.sacred-texts.com/bos/bos474.htm **Assignment #7 due– BRIEF ESSAY**

Week 10 C.S Lewis, fiction and Christianity

19 March Please aim to have C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (1945) read in its entirety by today. Also read Janina Traxler, "Once and Future Saxons: Nazis and Other Dark Forces in the Modern Arthurian Story" *Arthuriana*, Vol. 11.4 (2001): 96-107 (**OWLspace**). Finally read Barber, *Holy Grail*, chapter 20 "The Grail Today," pp 321-355. (And just for fun, here is a link to a parody of the Da Vinci Code as if written by Geoffrey Chaucer on the Chaucer Blog http://houseoffame.blogspot.com/2006/05/cipher-of-leonardo.html)

Week 11: **What has religion to do with Hollywood?**

26 March. Read Jeffery A. Smith, "Hollywood Theology: The Commodification of Religion in Twentieth-Century Films" *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Volume 11. 2 (2001): 191–231 (**OWLspace**); Catherine L. Albanese, "Fisher Kings and Public Places: The Old New Age in the 1990s," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 527, *Religion in the Nineties* (May, 1993): 131-143 (**OWLspace**); and extracts from Jeff Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago, 2011). (**OWLspace**) Portions of the **film** *Excalibur* (1981) 139 minutes may be shown in class.

Week 12

2 April **STUDENT SEMINARS**

Week 13

9 April **STUDENT SEMINARS**

Week 14

16 April. **STUDENT SEMINARS**

Week 15 Final film

23 April. We will be viewing Terry Gilliam's film, *The Fisher King* (1991) 137 min; discussion and review.

ASSIGNMENT #8 DUE TODAY - FINAL ESSAY

TAKE HOME EXAM ISSUED APRIL 24, DUE MAY 1

ASSIGNMENTS

The course requires five brief response papers (1-3 paragraphs each, basically under a page), one brief essay (2-3 pages), a final project (which includes a longer essay of 8-10 pages and a preliminary in-class seminar presentation), and a take-home final exam.

***ASSIGNMENTS #1-4 and 6. Jan 22, 29, Feb 5, 12, and 26. FIVE RESPONSES TO FILMS AND READINGS (MICROESSAYS): Approximately one page.** These "microessays" are responses to course content, and are meant to help you focus on, think about, and digest what you have read or seen. If there is a film in class the week before, you are required to respond to the film the following week, but otherwise responses may be to any reading from the class to that point. I You may respond to a passage that you like, or a section that has caused you some difficulty.

Response essays are meant to be written quickly; they need not be especially formal, but should suggest an idea (or governing question), have a structure, and show thought. In the case of a film, you need to summarize the plot. Students will share their responses with the class each week as a way of launching and focusing discussion. Documentation is not necessary beyond noting page or line number in primary source text of any quoted material (for reference during discussion, if required). Responses will be turned in after class. These microessays can also be seen as practice work for your longer essays (with smaller consequences if they don't work out). They will also serve as a "trial run" of ideas you may wish to elaborate in your final essay.

***Assignment #5 FINAL ESSAY TOPIC due February 19: 1 paragraph.** For the final essay you may choose any work we have read in class that interests you, and formulate a thesis about any aspect of it. If you wish, you may pick up an idea from one of your response paragraphs and

develop it further, or take it in a new direction, and you may also choose to extend the Brief Essay (described below for Assignment 6) into a longer treatment of the topc.

At this date, please write *a one paragraph description* of the project you would like to address in your final essay and hand it to me in class, or send it to me in an email, including any bibliography already consulted. You may begin working on your essay as soon as I have approved the topic. If the topic seems unlikely to work as proposed, I will suggest changes.

***Assignment #7 BRIEF ESSAY: Due March 12. Length: 2-3 pages.** The purpose of this essay is to get you formulating ideas about the relation between past and present uses of the grail story complex. Please pick one modern or contemporary author you have read who uses motifs from the grail story. This can be any author from 1800 to the present, and children's books are allowed, as are comic books, songs, poems, even medieval video games.

First, summarize the plot of your chosen text; second describe the parts you are linking to grail legends (the links can be fairly notional and the grail itself does not have to be mentioned; for example the idea of sacred quest in *The Silver Chair* by CS Lewis could be considered a viable topic). Make an argument about the ways the author or work does, or does not, accurately represent the spirit of the medieval narratives you have read in class. See me if you have any problem thinking of a story to use for this short assignment.

*** FINAL PROJECT SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS will take place in the last weeks of class, dates TBA.** Towards the end of term, all students will present in progress work on final essays.

***Assignment #8 FINAL PROJECT LONGER ESSAY: 8-10 pp. Due April 23. Topic as above.** Each student will submit a final essay with a proper argument on the topic proposed. All sources should be adequately documented. **You must cite all sources that you quote or paraphrase, as well as works to which you refer or from which you have culled information.** You may use any preferred documentation format. If you are not sure what documentation format you prefer (or if you don't know what a documentation format is) please follow Chicago Style citation format (humanities style). You can find most of what you need to know about Chicago Style on the University of Chicago Press Web Site. (Look at the quick guide first.) Further information on other formats may be found at the Rice Online Writing Lab documentation page. You may find other helpful tips by browsing the site.

***FINAL EXAM** will be take home and open book -- Issued April 24, **Due May 1**.

Percentages:

10% Response papers (4 @2.5 points each, lowest mark dropped)
10% class participation (NB: deduction for missed classes as noted above under "requirements")
20% first essay
5% final essay proposal (must be turned in to receive a mark)
35% final essay (grade for seminar will be rolled in)
20% final exam